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**ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS SECRETARY PRITCHARD JOINS PUBLIC, PRIVATE
PARTNERS TO CELEBRATE COMPLETION OF PLYMOUTH CHALLENGE FUNDING**

Final \$1.8 Million will Protect 1,200 Acres of Sensitive Plymouth Open Space

Environmental Affairs Secretary Stephen Pritchard today announced \$1.8 million in state funding for the acquisition and preservation of 1,200 sensitive acres in Plymouth. The parcels of land – including the 188-acre Talcott Property and parts of the Town Forest and Briggs Reservoir holdings – are vulnerable pieces of open space that are home to more than two dozen threatened and endangered species. With these funds, the state's Division of Fisheries and Wildlife purchased Conservation Restrictions, which assure that the parcels and present wildlife will be permanently protected and the land will remain available for enjoyment by the public.

"I congratulate Plymouth, its partners and state and local elected officials on securing the final \$1.8 million of the promised \$3.5 million to complete one of state's largest and most ambitious environmental initiatives," said Secretary Pritchard. "With Plymouth identifying the right land to conserve and the state providing the funding and planning tools necessary to implement smart growth, a model state-local partnership has been formed. Plymouth's great environmental value makes it ever more important that measures be taken to plan carefully for growth, while conserving the natural resources that are such a big part of the local quality of life."

Geographically, Plymouth is the largest town in Massachusetts and is home to more than 200 rare and threatened species, second in the state only to the Island of Nantucket. The Plymouth Challenge was a commitment made in 1997 of \$3.5 million from the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs to the Town of Plymouth to assist with land conservation and smart growth planning. Challenge funds have been used to acquire and conserve more than 1,400 acres of open space and to complete a Town Master Plan and an Open Space Corridor Plan. These provided a planning foundation on which to decide where growth should most appropriately occur.

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“Here in Plymouth, we have a uniquely diverse grouping of rare species and increased development is rapidly diminishing our unused land. It is critical that we make sure that open spaces are preserved for our unique wildlife and for the enjoyment of residents and visitors,” said Senator Therese Murray, Chairwoman of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means. “Protecting this land is an investment in the future our town and, since 1997, we have worked to make sure that this goal was accomplished. I am so pleased that I was able to play a part in preserving this beautiful, undeveloped land.”

In addition to protecting vulnerable rare and threatened species habitat and preserving open space for the public to enjoy, the Plymouth Challenge has been a major contributor to local efforts to create a connective greenway between Myles Standish State Forest and the Massachusetts Bay.

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